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10 Years Later in Rwanda, the Dead Are Ever Present

By MARC LACEY

MURAMBI, Rwanda — If, for whatever reason, one has the desire to relive the horror of the Rwandan massacre of 10 years ago, Emmanuel Murangira is the man to see.

Mr. Murangira, 48, is a survivor of a schoolyard blood bath that killed tens of thousands of people seeking refuge on the hilltop campus of a technical school here that has become one of the country's many memorials to the dead. He walks soberly and silently as he guides visitors down the hallways. He unlocks classroom after classroom and pushes open the doors.

"This is genocide," he says.

Inside, the rooms are full of the partially preserved remains of hundreds of those who were killed by Hutu extremists. The stench is overpowering. The scene is worse still.

Closer inspection of the remains, which have been treated with a traditional substance to slow decomposition, reveals exactly in what manner many of them died.

A woman has her arms over her face, as if protecting herself from attack. One of her forearms has been hacked off. Another, a youngster, has a thin crack across his skull, the imprint of a machete.

All across Rwanda, there are similar scenes of butchery, preserved by survivors just as they were. But with the 10th anniversary of the mass killing approaching in April, the Rwandan authorities are working to bury the bones while still preserving the memories of the estimated 800,000 Tutsi, who make up a minority in the country, and moderate Hutus who died.

"We want the memorials to be centers for the exchange of ideas, not collections of bones," said Ildephonse Karengera, the country's director of memorials.

But just what to do with all the remains is the question. Some want the bones displayed for as long as they last as evidence of what happened, just in case doubters emerge. But Rwandans traditionally bury their dead and some people say it is disrespectful to leave so many bones and bodies exposed.

A compromise is emerging, one that calls for burying more bodies without sanitizing the horror of what occurred.

"For those who say it is undignified to show bones, we're burying them, in a sense, behind dark glass," said Dr. James Smith, who runs Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial

Center in Britain and is working with the Rwandan government to revamp some of its memorials. "For those who say it is necessary to see the death, we're accommodating them, too."

The memorials are just one part of Rwanda's attempt to recover from the events of 1994. The Tutsi-led government that now runs Rwanda has eliminated ethnicity from identity cards and made it a crime to say or do anything that can be construed as "divisionist."

As for prosecuting those who killed, an international tribunal is slowly working its way through the big fish while Rwandan courts handle the lieutenants. With too many offenders to possibly try, President Paul Kagame recently released tens of thousands of people from jail and ordered them to face community trials, known as gacacas.

Those proceedings, which will begin countrywide in the coming months, are already having one unforeseen effect. Defendants are pointing out with more specificity where the killing occurred, and more remains are being found. Some bodies were dumped into latrines. Others have spent the last decade in swamps. Mass graves are being dug up, as well.

Rwanda hopes the 10th anniversary will attract worldwide attention to the country, its past but also its attempts to recover. On the morning of April 7, the date the killing began in earnest, the government is planning a somber march through the city, followed by 10 minutes of silence. The main memorial in Kigali will officially open its doors.

The federal government intends to focus its attention on a handful of main memorials. Local jurisdictions will maintain other sites. But locals will be encouraged to begin using some properties again, despite the unimaginable things that happened there.

"Everybody wants a memorial," Mr. Karengera said. "But the whole country can't be covered with memorials. We're a small country. We can't live with that kind of chaos."

Thanks to donations from Rwanda's former colonial power, Belgium, and the foundation run by former President Bill Clinton, work is under way on an education center at the school in Murabi that will tell the story of the killings without offering up so much first-hand evidence.

Mr. Murangira narrowly escaped death himself. He was shot in the head during the attack on the school. But somehow, hidden under corpses and bleeding from his head, he managed to live.

There were only three other survivors that day and Mr. Murangira, with a deep indentation in his forehead from where the bullet was removed, wants to make sure that the attack is never forgotten. The smell, the sight, he can deal with that.

"Those who smell are my relatives," he said. "How can I mind?"

All the same, Mr. Murangira is thrilled that a permanent memorial will soon take the place of his ad hoc effort to keep the victims' memories alive. "It's hard for me to be here," he said. "But I cannot leave before they put things in order."

A similar overhaul is planned for the church in Ntarama, west of Kigali, where the space between the pews is filled with human remains and bloody clothes. In the back, survivors of the massacre here have lined up skulls, reserving a special row for the children.

"I want people to see the bones," said Pacific Rutaganda, 48, who survived the church slaughter but lost his sisters, parents and in-laws inside. "I don't want them buried away. There is no way if you see this that you can say genocide never happened. Genocide happened."

He then began pointing at the skulls, indicating the weapon used to kill each person. "This is an ax," he said, noting a huge gash in the temple of one victim. "This is a bullet. Here's an arrow and here's a club."

Dancilla Nyirabanzungu said her family was somewhere in the church. She lost her husband, 2 children and 15 other relatives in April 1994.

Pregnant at the time, she survived because bodies collapsed on top of her and the killers assumed she was dead, too.

Soon afterward, though, she gave birth to a boy, whom she named Hakizimana, or Only God Can Save.

He is nearly 10 now, and he knows little about what happened in the year of his birth. He knows that his father died with all the others in the church. And he knows his mother is drawn to the place, sitting on the front step just about every day.

But for him, the church yard is a playground, one that attracts many visitors. "People keep coming," he said.

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